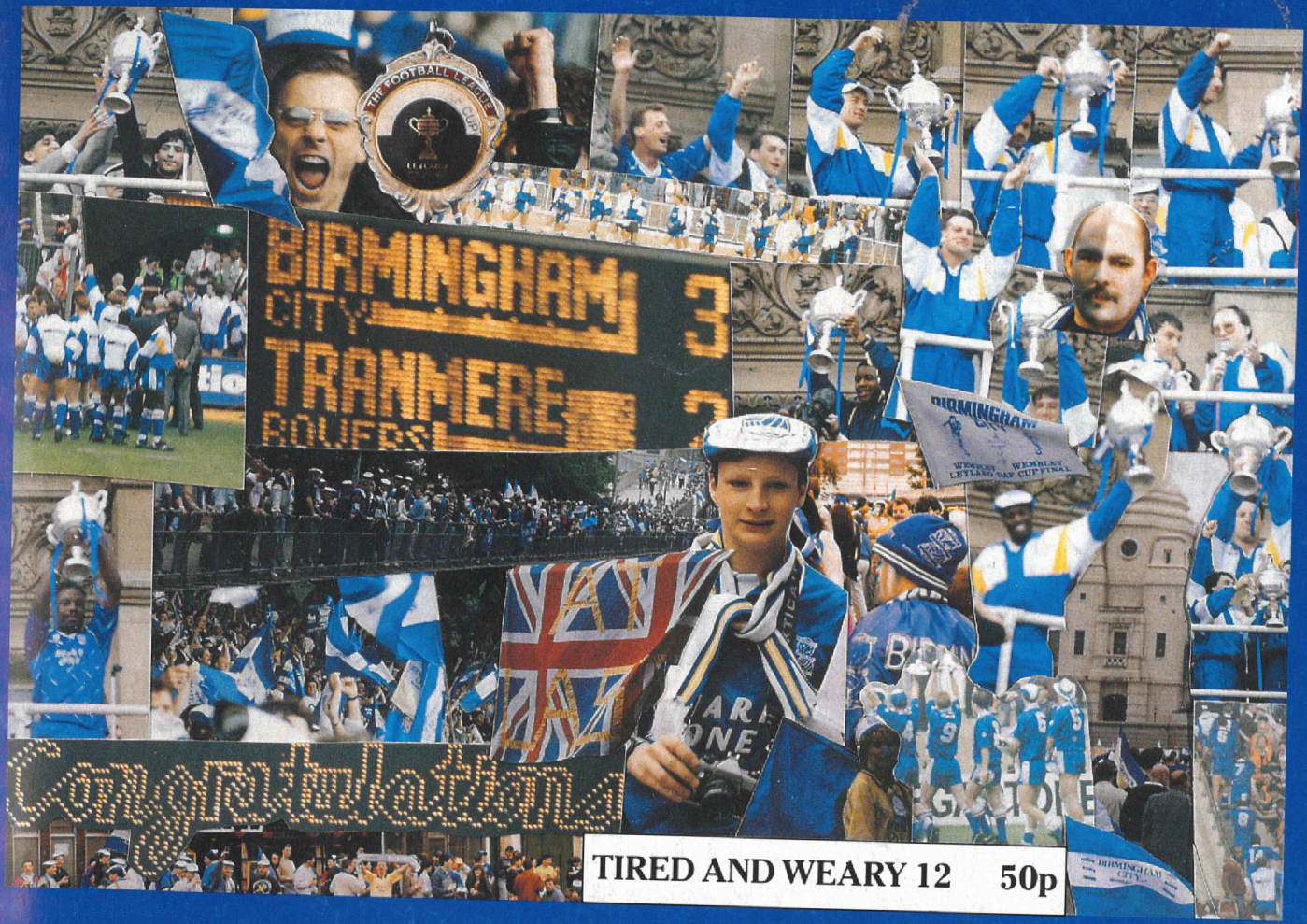


TIRED AND WEARY 12 50p

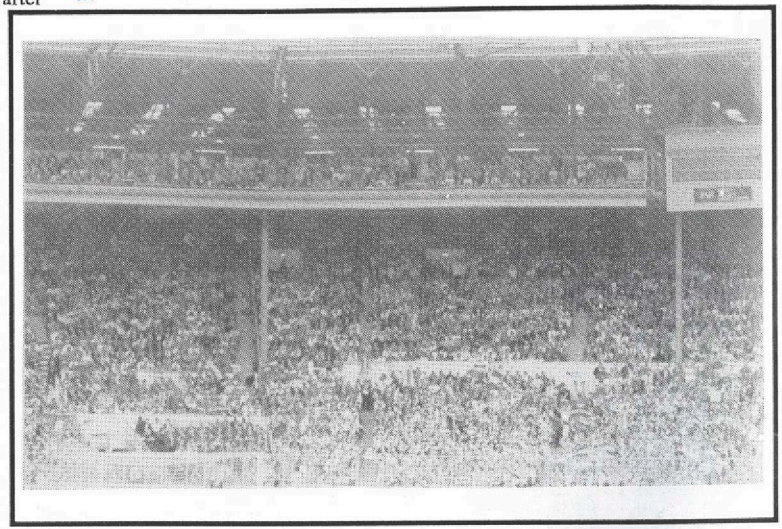
Tales of the Unexpected

At long last an issue of Tired and Weary celebrating the joy, pleasure and elation of following a successful, cup winning team... the re-birth of the Blues! We're still the Kings of Brum! 45,000 can't be wrong! Glory, glory hosanna! Sleeping giant awakes! We're on the match with... oh sod it! We've divided the magazine into two sections. The first concentrates on Cup Final events - before, during and after Wembley: that night at Brentford, the Open Day, Ian Clarkson tells what it's like to play in a Wembley final while two Tranmere fans recount how the whole thing was viewed from Birkenhead. Four Blues supporters recall their trips to the Final while another reviews the match. Lastly we describe the Civic Reception and review the media's coverage of all things Wembley.

The second section - 'After The Lord Mayor's Show' - should have been unnecessary. So much has occurred, so much acrimony, so many claims and counter-claims that it's still not clear what's really happening. Since we last went to press the Blues Action Group has been formed and co-founder Steve Jones explains why. Peter Brannan, ex-Commercial Manager and one of the Kumar's chief critics, opines that the Brothers have failed us, saying all we want is the truth. Putting the case for the Defence, Eric Partridge, newly installed as Blues' General Manager. After four years of writing Tired and Weary, Partridge is the first senior club official to agree to be interviewed by us - for three hours in fact! Naturally, after so much has happened we've thrown in our own two-penn'orth as well.

Finally, and possibly more important than any other issue facing our club and our game - the Super League - the FA's crime against ALL football fans. If you support the Super League, we are your enemy and Steve Moss, Chairman of the West Midlands FSA details why and what might be done to stop it. Now read on, dot dot dot.

If you like your social life buggered up (or if you're a social leper) then working on Tired and Weary could be for you. Due to changes in our personal circumstances, producing the magazine is becoming increasingly difficult. If it's to come out with any regularity we need a bit of help - so get in touch. Also, we feel that Blues would benefit from having more than one fanzine (aside that is from the London Supporters Club Newsletter) so if you're thinking about writing one, don't - just do it!



TIRED AND WEARY
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STOCKISTS T&W can be purchased from: Nostalgia and Comics, Smallbrook Queensway; Virgin Records, Corporation St, Birmingham; Key Books, High St, Digbeth, Birmingham; Swordfish Records, Needless Alley, Birmingham; Waterstones Bookshop, High Streeet, Birmingham; Birmingham Polytechnic Students Union Shop, Perry Barr, Birmingham. Tired and Weary No's 1-8 are long gone. Issues 9,10 &11 can be yours for 50p each (22p A5 SAE) again by writing to Longmore Road. To guarantee receiving the next two issues please send a cheque or postal order for £1.44 made payable to Tired and Weary. We still have copies of Birmingham City - A Complete Record for sale at £14.95 including p&p. Printed by Juma, First Floor, Trafalgar Works, 44 Wellington Street, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S1 4HD. Printed on recycled paper.

Brentford - The Old Wive's Tale

The scramble for tickets that sat for ages on the kitchen table of our Pimlico flat; the endless 'phone calls from all those strange men claiming to be Blues fans - how could I ever forget the Brentford game?

Still life went on, plans were made and the big day arrived. We were to meet in a pub near the ground, a big one, the name escapes me - one of those famous pub/eateries. I'm sure I should have been aware of the importance of the match - I'm sure I was told. I know I expected to, and gradually did, see all the faces I know and love, having spent most Saturdays for the last few seasons sat on a motorway somewhere in the country with them.

I wasn't expecting so many blue and white bodies singing good humouredly (drunk?) around the pubs. The atmosphere was good; for once there were no thoughts of losing today. Time to leave for the ground. I remember the road through Brentford's narrow entrance gates; the high profile policing - my ambition to be searched by a male policeman thwarted again, and then onto the terraces. Game on.

Many fans were pissed but the match, and the atmosphere, were enjoyable. The Blues end was by no means packed although we'd sold our ticket allocation within hours. The empty spaces (perhaps a thousand) annoyed people, given the demand. Neither were the Brentford seats at the opposite end to us anywhere near full.

I know the more football-minded academics will be able to criticise individual players more ably than I but to me it seemed the lads were eager and keen to win. For the first time in ages they appeared to know what they were doing and fought tirelessly to keep Brentford at bay. Unlike in the recent League game here they always seemed in control, and it was the sort of totally committed performace we'd come to expect from them under Lou. At times the terraces were quiet and Blues seemed to be tiring (again) as the score remained 0-0. John Gayle was playing well and my previous opinion of him was faltering. Frustration set in - taken out on the masses of police who appeared like giant ants and promptly stood en masse in front of us 'dangerous' fans, videos on us just in case. Numerous polite requests to move fell on deaf ears - "speak to the boss mate".

Half-time, 0-0; good humour mingled with frustrated resignation that we'd go through on aggregate - "just don't let a goal in Thommo!!" "Hold them out" "Has anyone got Sky TV?" More bloody police appeared around the pitch. Second half; here we go....

It seemed hours later (but in reality only 32 minutes) that Simon Sturridge scored. Brilliant!! Mayhem, hysteria, joy!!! "We're going to Wemberley" - "WEM-BER-LEY - WEMBERLEY", hugs and kisses all round - RELIEF/JOY - AMAZING!!

I was too busy picking up everybody's lost change for beers afterwards to concentrate on the game now. I know that final whistle was YEARS later!! "Are you watching St. Andrews?"

For the first time ever it was a joy to be kept locked in at the end. The sheer jubilance of the crowd was echoed by the players who returned to the pitch for some delirious jumping up and down and a shirt and shoe throwing contest that would put The Chippendales to shame. A Sky TV cameraman perched behind us looked very bemused.

When we were finally released a massive impromptu Blue and White party started up in the car park, while the streets were filled with singing and dancing Midlanders. We

went back to the pub where the celebrations started again - and there wasn't a Brentford fan in sight. Two pints later we persuaded our leader to part company with a few pounds for a bottle of bubbly and soon we were singing again... "Wem-berley", "here we go, here we go, we're going to Wemberley".... followed by a rousing chorus of 'Keep Right On' which left us tired and emotional, and the locals bewildered. Ha! Ha!

Mrs Lad Done Brilliant

THE OPEN DAY

Sunday May 19th and the queues were three deep, stretched the length of St. Andrews Road and the sound of £3 per head (and I didn't get a free blue nose) rang sweetly in Samesh Kumar's ears. The sacred St. Andrews turf had been taken over by bouncy castles, side stalls and a mass of people clearly intent on enjoying themselves as they soaked up the carnival pre-Wembley atmosphere.

Despite the luxury of being allowed to set foot on the playing area I still half expected Tom Ross to insist fans "keep off the pitch" or to be charged by mounted police. Leyland DAF commemorative tops soon sold out but other memorabilia was in supply with hats, scarves, T-Shirts etc. waiting to be snapped up by the souvenir-hungry Blues fan.

Fifties hero Eddie Brown proved a popular figure with fans of all ages. The current playing staff mingled with supporters, chatting and signing autographs. Three notable exceptions were Thomas, Matthewson and Gayle. At either end of the pitch there were competitions. The Tilton Road End provided fans with the opportunity to take a penalty (30p a go, Thomas and Williams both absent) while at the Railway End supporters could try to kick a dead ball through one of four tyres hanging from the crossbar. This proved quite testing for those queuing for the tour of the ground. Dodging wayward shots soon became second nature.

The tour proved the most frustrating item on the Blues Open Day agenda. More people than expected wished to take part and so, to overcome the problem, the stewards increased the numbers per tour from 15 to 25. After waiting around 30 minutes we were eventually taken 'behind the scenes'. Sadly things became poorly organised as people from different parties collided in corridors. The tour involved being shown inside an Executive box, Tom Ross' matchday box, the players' lounge (where they were enjoying a drink at the time!) and finally onto the changing rooms. This meant another wait of 30 minutes before seeing both dressing rooms, the match officials room, the boot room and the physio room.

We were told where certain players prefer to sit prior to a match, who is the slowest runner (Trevor Aylott), what they wear and what time they arrive (by 1.15 on Saturdays). We were also informed that the physio room was not as well equipped as one would wish due to lack of money - now where have I heard that before?

Unfortunately some parts of the ground were out of bounds despite this being an 'open day'. The Executive Members Lounge and the Boardroom were inaccessible. No reasons were given but one sensed a hint of snobbery on the club's behalf. Later in the day however the kit room was understandably closed after some tops went missing.

Finally, after around five hours worth of open day the players boarded an open top bus to the cheers of hundreds of proud Blues supporters. With a turnout estimated at around 4,000 Blues Open Day had proved a success and for me (despite the traumas of the ground tour) an enjoyable and relaxing afternoon.

PAUL BERRY

Saturday Night and ...

Birmingham city centre on a Saturday afternoon, full of Mark One merchandise-wearing shoppers. The day before I'd waited an hour to get into the club shop - further evidence of the city's anticipation and excitement.

I travelled to London on a sweaty, cramped coach showing 'Carry On Matron' on the video. Arriving in the capital and taking a Bakerloo tube I came across my first Blues fans, dressed in yellow change strip, crawling along the carriage floor. It was about 5pm but the scene was reminiscent of the last train home. That night I headed for central London in search of fellow West Midlanders. Things seemed surprisingly quiet. After last orders I wandered out of a Soho pub and in the far distance picked up the sound of Brummie singing. I followed my ears as the strains of 'Shit on the Villa' got ever nearer, 'til I reached Trafalgar Square. What a sight! Hundreds of revellers singing, dancing and reeling around the fountains. Passers-by and tourists appeared bewildered as merrymakers in full Birmingham City regalia came from everywhere, tottering and stumbling to the champions ball. What a happy time we were having! Every so often a thunderous version of 'Keep Right On' rang out. Londoners passed on best wishes as the ever increasing throng good-naturedly chanted back 'We hate Cockney s!'

Blues fans outside Kilburn pub, Sunday morning

Some were now semi-naked, many in the water, in an atmosphere of joyous celebration. Trying to explain to a group of Spanish tourists what merited such midnight revelry proved almost impossible.

But as we've seen before, the line between celebration and aggravation is a very thin one. And suddenly the situation changed; an arrest, scuffle, and chaos broke loose. Bottles thrown and utter confusion for a couple of frenetic minutes. People running in every direction, scenes reminiscent of the Poll Tax disturbances as riot police dispersed the mob. An uneasy calm followed.

Would this sour the weekend? I needn't have worried.

Sunday morning and GLR welcome the visitors from the second

Sunday Afternoon

city to today's game. I set off for Kilburn, where by midday the streets are packed. Each pub told the same story - Birmingham fans outside enjoying every moment. After visiting so many footballing backwaters with Blues, having a pre-match drink before Wembley was hard to take in. Everyone seemed so happy. Travelling through Willesden, Dollis Hill and Neasden en route to the Twin Towers, it hit me that I'd yet to see a Tranmere supporter.

The sight as I came out of Wembley Park tube would have made the hairs on the back of your neck bristle. A blue and white mass festooned Olympic Way. Everywhere people were in incredibly high spirits; all sported blue garments and many had blue noses.

Through the turnstile and the party spirit increased a level as supporters milled about waving flags and raising voices a decible, using the inner tunnel echo to full effect.

My only previous visit to Wembley was to an international 12-13 years ago, but now, entering the bowl of the stadium, the enormity of the footballing arena hit home. I doubt any of us could believe - or will ever forget - the size and sight of our support and we congratulated ourselves on the achievement. The Tranmere end, on the other hand, was almost deserted.

Seeing Birmingham City walking out onto the Wembley turf was tremendous and the crescendo of noise that greeted the team was worthy of the occasion.

Blues outplayed Tranmere first half, and although Rovers didn't perform it shouldn't detract from how excellently we played. Gayle's goal was a stunner and only a superb save on the stroke of half-time denied us a 3-0 lead.

Tranmere played far better second half, putting Blues under the cosh. When they equalised it was difficult to see how we could come back - the team looked knackered. The support was strangely muted, either because of how the game was going or due to everyone losing their voice. What with the brilliant, unexpected nature of the winner, our cries of celebration must have been audible over most of London. Supporters hugged one another with joy as 'Keep Right On' boomed out for the umpteenth time. Vince Overson picked up the cup in front of 45,000 fans; what a pity he would soon turn his back on the club.

After the lap of honour people left the stadium in a party mood, although I didn't feel as raucous as post-Brentford. But at that moment for once Birmingham City were on top of the world and bringing home a cup - while Villa were managerless and with nothing to shout about. Sadly we didn't know how short-lived this victorious champagne moment was to be - if not shattered, soured and overshadowed by events about to unfold. However the subsequent bitter acrimony can't take away our long-overdue Wembley memories.

I stayed in London - there were no victory celebrations in Trafalgar Square that night; no repeat of the pre-match merrymaking. The party had headed back up the M1 and carried over in Brum. Yet when I travelled home some days later there were a few fellow stragglers on the coach, still wearing their Blues colours with pride. The video showed 'Carry On Matron' - AGAIN! If only it had been 'Carry On Macari'.

Hugh O'Sullivan

The Poseur's Tale

Poseurs!

It was a cold November evening in Walsall when the dream began. I wasn't getting too excited though, remembering the previous year's Aldershot debacle. But at Bescot Stadium we won 1-0 with a Peter Skipper o.g. Three days later and I was off to the other side of the world to watch England's cricketers in Australia. You could say I'm not a true fan, after all I didn't see the 2-0 win over Lincoln. But having seen the attendance - a paltry 2,922 - not many of you did either. At least I had an excuse.

Three months of sunshine later I returned to witness the first round proper against Swansea at St. Andrews. There weren't many there and they only opened half the Kop but you could tell something special was about to happen. Well, it didn't happen in the first 10 minutes, nor the next 30. Maybe nobody told the Taffs there wasn't a replay. So it was penalties - fortunately we had Martin Thomas in goal and no Waddle or Pearce.

Mansfield next - to be honest I can't remember a thing about this match except that afterwards I heard we'd drawn Cambridge in the next round. The Wembley dream was nice while it lasted I thought.

Roll on March 5th. Pre this game I was just pleasantly annoying my work colleagues about our upcoming trip to Wembley - after it they heard about nothing else. It was during the Cambridge match, after about 2 minutes actually, that I started to believe it was just possible. Then again John Barnes' goals for Watford in 1984 were still in the back of my mind.

The Area Final First Leg against Brentford was special. A big crowd, no chance of getting refreshments, pints of steaming piss flowing down Spion Kop. Just like the good old days. After about 30 minutes something strange happened. We had a surge... now when did that last happen? We had another in the second half and then disaster - they pulled one back and I thought the earth had opened up. As I left the ground the Brentford fans were singing (which was more than they did at their place) and it felt as if we'd lost.

So to the second leg. A day off work and off to a pub near the ground to soak up the atmosphere and a few ales. I got in early and soon our section started filling up. Samesh paid us a visit and fans shook his hand and groped his girlfriend. I was so nervous before the match - and during it for that matter, and I don't remember a great deal except Vinnie's attempt to cut a Brentford player in half and, of course, the goal. Two seconds after Sturridge's shot hit the back of the net I remember looking up and seeing stars. I sang all the way home and all night. Work next day was incredible. We had a champagne celebration at lunch time and part of the afternoon if I remember correctly.

Fortunately, for me at least getting a ticket was fairly easy - I'm both a share and season ticket holder. Next it was transport to organise. Train? coach? car? No, limousine of course! When we played Colchester in the FA Cup a few years back we promised ourselves that if we ever reached Wembley we'd go in style. So we did.

Building up to the big day I thought of nothing else. Eventually May 26th arrived and the limousine, a stretch Lincoln complete with chauffeur, tv, drinks cabinet and just about everything but the kitchen sink, picked us up outside the ground nice and early. The five of us: Steve and Dean Wragg, Andy King, Dean Lucas and I cruised down the M1 at 70 mph in the middle lane, colours flying out of the windows and from the bonnet motif. The looks we got had to be seen to be believed - even John Westmancoat smiled at us from within the Blues officials coach.

We arrived at Wembley early, so after a trip round the car parks we found a pub for an hour. We returned to find Wembley Way packed with Blues fans, and more Blues fans, and more Blues fans. We parked the limo in the VIP car park - they must have thought we were famous! After a walk up and down Wembley Way, endless photos and the memorable moment when the team coach went past, we entered the stadium.

Once inside the first thing I saw was an Aston Villa banner dangling from the ceiling. Not surprisingly it was pelted with everything going. One drunk even tried to piss on it. Now whose bragging?

The charity match had already started when I found my seat. Who were these people? Surely they could have found some Brummies? There was only Bev Bevan and the Carrott. We lost 3-2 (ironically) but Jaspar was the star as he mimicked scoring the winner and celebrated in true Wembley style, running to a sea of blue and white behind the goal.

I've seen countless Wembley finals on tv and

always wondered just what it was like when the teams came out. Words can't describe it.

For the proponents of all-seater stadia this match would have scotched their plans. I don't remember sitting down throughout the whole 90 minutes. When Simon Sturridge scored I fell off my seat, when John Gayle put us 2-0 up I suddenly realised what heaven is really like. Everything was going right except for Nixon's brilliant save from Dean Peer's volley. 2-0 up at half-time - surely we're home and dry. Half an hour later I realised what hell was like. I just waited for the Tranmere winner. They could have had a penalty when Yates 'winded' John Morrissey. Instead John Gayle did his Roy of the Rovers bit; as the ball hit the back of the net I shrieked but I don't think anything came out. The stadium erupted like Krakatoa; we sang, cried, danced and five or six long, long minutes later we celebrated like never before.

As Vinnie lifted the Leyland DAF Cup tears rolled down my cheeks. A 23-year old crying - but believe me, I wasn't alone. The lap of honour took for ever and I was still in a state of shock. It may only be the Leyland DAF but to a Blues nut it meant everything.

The journey home was memorable and the motorway was a mass of blue and white. We sipped champagne and gulped beer all the way. As we arrived back in Birmingham we stopped at some lights and a girl in an adjacent car, believing I was Phil Robinson, congratulated me on my performance. I think she'd been on the champers as well. I got to the Old Varsity Tavern just in time to see the satellite coverage of the game. We stood there just as tense and nervous as we had five hours earlier. The result was the same but John Gayle's winner seemed more spectacular.

Blues team coach goes down Olympic Way

Despite a dreadful hangover I made it to the Civic Reception the next day. I remember the last time we were honoured - after getting promotion in 1985. That celebration was tainted by the Leeds riot but this time NOTHING could spoil it. Well, not for another 22 days anyway.

Matt Cole

The Exile's Tale

The Leyland DAF Cup Final was poised to be the biggest day of my life as I set out from Plymouth early on Sunday May 26th. But wait, I'm no 'hanger-on', I'm a student exiled at college in Devon, so I had a clear conscience with no worries about MY credentials as a True Blue. But anyway, this was a day out for EVERYONE, even those who could stand no more pain during the seventies and eighties. May 26th 1991 was the reward for our prison-like suffering at the hands of Wheldon, Bond, Pendrey and Mackay. It was as if someone more influential than a gypsy curse had said: "OK fellas, you've suffered enough, go out and ENJOY yourself!" Destination: Wembley!

Fans near Wembley Park tube

Although there was the odd Blues and Tranny fan on the train up to Paddington, it was at the London station itself where Brummies seemed to emerge from all directions. You'd look around and there'd be 10, then look around a few seconds later and, like that famous scene in Hitchcock's The Birds, there'd be another 50! Tube trains whisked us to the National Stadium's doorstep, each full of Royal Blue and White - heaven knows what a tourist new to the Capital would have made of it! At Wembley Park the carriages returned to normality as the Blues' troops marched from the trains towards the Twin Towers - it was as if we'd all been there a thousand times! From the tube station bridge the first sight of the stadium - oh my god, not long now! Wembley Way though was something else entirely: a sea of Blue bodies converging on 'The Venue of Legends' - the police looked bemused, perhaps knowing our average attendance at St. Andrews - Brummies here, Brummies there, Brummies every ..... where! it was a case of spot the boys from Birkenhead - "oh look, there's one, no it's not, it's another Blues fan... perhaps that's one....." It obviously wasn't quite that extreme but it was clear who'd be making ALL the noise in the stadium.

Through the turnstiles, and thousands of fans from both clubs mingled together, chatting, singing and dancing and I still hadn't seen the SLIGHTEST hint of any trouble. Yet why? After all these were Birmingham City fans, feared the world over - don't believe a word of it my friend! Us Brummies are an easygoing, humourous lot who would prove to the country, particularly the inhabitants of London and Birkenhead what wonderful people we really are!

So to my seat which, due to good stewarding and signposting, was surprisingly easy to find. I remember at my first ever League match, the sight of the pitch and the stands visually hit me as I emerged at the top of the steps into the ground, yet at Wembley I didn't consciously notice it all until I sat down and looked up.... hell, there are those twin towers I've seen so often on the tele. Now it finally sank in, that we'd actually beaten Brentford in the Area Final.

The obligatory charity game ensured most people took their places by the recommended time of 2.15. Jasper Carrott was worshipped like a god, soaking it up in his own modest (!) way. Great stuff! - You can keep Nigel Kennedy.

The main event loomed ever closer. I was nervous; defeat was unthinkable. Enter the teams, little Lou leading us out. God, this was so surreal, you could almost imagine the entire scene hanging in The Tate signed by Salvador Dali!

So to the match: after about ten minutes John Gayle had a good header brilliantly saved by Eric Nixon in the Rovers goal. I wished thta had gone in, knowing that Brum's much feared (!) attack couldn't afford to waste chances. I needn't have worried hotugh, because on 20 minutes Simon put us one up - 2 defenders on him and the 'keeper bearing down on his 5'5" frame but still be stuck it cooly away, 1-0 and I went mental!

Then with half-time looming Gayle received a short pass from Yates, turned his defender unbelievably well and rifled the ball into the net from an awkward angle and distance. 2-0 and I went mental again! Sitting back down I turned to my father - a veteran of Gil Merrick and Co. - and we both said in unison!! I didn't know he had it in him". Forty thousand others were probably thinking the same thing. Then, with the interval just seconds away, Dean Peer's close range volley was exceptionally (no other word for it) turned away by Nixon - if I live to be 100 I still won't

The teams come out

fathom how he saved it. If we'd gone in 3 up I don't think even Rovers could've come back, but 2-0, well, we'll have to wait and see.

It was vital we started the second half well to stifle Tranmere's predicted opening sting but unfortunately the Blue Machine looked as if someone had dropped a sleeping agent into its half-time tea-urn. We weren't playing well from the start but then Rovers made a bold double substitution with Malkin and Martindale coming on - still, nothing too ominous in that I thought. Within three minutes Steve Cooper had pulled a goal back and I started worrying again. Tranmere were playing with great confidence and looked have twice as many players as us, so it wouldn't have surprised me if they'd got another two and won the thing, especially once Sturridge went off (I just hope Dennis Bailey had said his prayers the previous night). Eight minutes later and Jim Steele made my world cave in, all I could hear was the Tranmere supporters celebrating as the pitch spun round in front of me. 2-2 and I was very quiet, VERY QUIET. I was becoming restless, looking around the ground instead of at the action, wondering what sins I'd committed to make us reach the brink of defeat.

Yet suddenly Blues started playing a little better, as if they knew the equaliser was on its way and that now it had finally arrived they could get back to business again. True, we weren't playing to the dizzy heights of the first half, but at least we were managing to cross the halfway line. Extra time loomed and with the players dead on their feet there seemed no way a tired and weary looking Blues could overcome rampant Rovers, but I'd forgotten Gayle, playing the game of his career. Six minutes left and the big man launched himself for a stupendous overhead kick. 3-2!!! If he'd tried to score a goal like that at St. Andrews the ball would probably have ended up on Coventry Road. But this wasn't St. Andrews, this was Wembley and King John had won us t'cup. It may be clichéd to say that those last six minutes were the longest I'd ever known, but they were.

May 26th 1991 - the greatest day in my life: forget about Sunday Trading and Keep Sundays Sacred, because as far as I'm concerned, Sundays should be for watching the pride of Birmingham win at Wembley! I just hope that I took it all in because you constantly hear of players saying you take it in much better second time round and it's exactly the same for a supporter. Still, we'll just have to get there next year as well....! Blues v Albion - I'll settle for that!

Gavin Troth

The Player's Tale

Sunday May 26th 1991 and I woke at 9.30 after my first decent night's sleep since we'd arrived at Reading University. With all the excitement and interest back in Birmingham, being at the campus really helped take the pressure off us, but the late night activities of the students had proved a bit much! Fortunately, we'd overcome this problem by swapping rooms with the press.

The early morning atmosphere on matchday was strange; a lot of the players a bit subdued (probably nervous anticipation). We went down for breakfast at about 11.00 (the food had been pretty good all week) and then Lou instructed us to go for a walk. By this time the players were really starting to buzz. Just one final photo session outside the coach in our suits and, at 12.45, we were ready to leave for the stadium. On the journey down Tom Ross came in for some stick which helped relieve the tension. I don't think anyone quite realised how much it all meant to the fans until we drove along Wembly Way. Everyone just looked in amazement at the mass of blue and white - where were the Tranmere supporters?

IAN CLARKSON

We reached the stadium gates around 1.40 and headed straight for the pitch. Doing a lap of honour seemed a little premature, but with all those fans.... and it had to be a lap, as they took up the whole stadium! I saw my girlfriend and her mate waving madly and, looking around section after section of Brummies, I remember thinking we just couldn't lose.

Back in the dressing room the build up was good. There was no referee's pre-match talk, we just concentrated on the job ahead and, in particular, how we would play, rather than worrying about Tranmere's approach. I was surprised how relaxed I felt and before I knew it it was 2.45 and time to leave the dressing room. The roar that hit us as we emerged from the tunnel was quite deafening and, turning around to the lads, everyone looked supremely determined. A few Tranmere fans spat at us - you shrug that sort of thing off - but nothing was going to dampen my spirits!

The pre-match formalities were really moving, though I didn't know until I read the programme afterwards who all the dignitaries were (sorry Denis Compton). The national anthem started and I knew my dreams of reaching Wembley with Blues had become reality and I was determined to enjoy every minute.

We were really psyched up and we got off to a flying start, playing really well. Then the moment: I knock a long ball, Gayley flicks it on, their 'keeper comes out and hesitates and Simon Sturridge runs on to smack it home. The stadium just erupted - I can't describe how I felt.

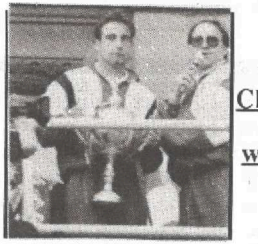
I've heard it said that Tranmere were more interested in the following week's play-off final but I don't believe that. If you're a professional then every game - particularly a Wembley final - you give your all. Tranmere were really going for it but just couldn't get into it. We battered them for the rest of the half and a superb turn and shot by the Big Man put us 2-0 up at the break. We left the pitch with the sound of the loudest support in the Midlands (and, as either a fan or player, I've heard them all) ringing in our ears.

We didn't say much at half-time, everyone just rested and drank lots of water. Under Lou and Chic we wouldn't really worry much

Leyland DAF Cup - Winners Medal

about our opponents' tactics but instead concentrated on how we'd play. We began the second period where we'd left off, with Rovers trying to knock the ball around and play themselves back into the game but not really getting anywhere. Yet, as all us Blues fans know, to win 2-0 just wouldn't be Birmingham City's style. We had to go and shoot ourselves in the foot. Tranmere started blocking my attacking space down the right and Frainy's down the left, and they also threw more men forward. Before I knew it, they'd made it 2-2 and believe me, if you were sweating in the stands, it was worse for us.

It's maybe a bit surprising, but Wembley's pitch isn't that much bigger than our own and we certainly didn't find ourselves suffering from cramp or tired limbs. Our morale was still good and we re-organised and earned a free kick down the right. I took it and aimed for Vince who nodded it across for Gayley to score a goal in a million. I though there was still about 15-20 minutes left. Normally during a game you don't really pay attention to the bench - and at Wembley even less so because they're



Ian Clarkson with the cup

so far away. But when we signalled to them to ask how long there was to go I was amazed whey they replied only about 5 minutes. We kept on heckling the ref. to blow up. I saw him check with his linesmen twice. Then the best moment - he blew for time and we'd won!

I felt very emotional waiting for the presentation as what we'd achieved sank in: not even Trevor Francis had won at Wembley with Blues. As Vince picked up the cup I remember screaming my lungs out. The lap of honour was just a blur. What a day, what a set of fans and what a set of memories.

Ian Clarkson

The Match

It's sad but I'd never really thought of Blues as a proper football outfit before. More also rans, there for the benefit of other clubs and their supporters. But that was before Wembley. For a while the usual St. Andrews political intrigue was forgotten as, for the first time in ages, we had a football match that we could all get excited about. For those treasured few weeks between Brentford and May 26th, those oh so fleeting Final minutes and that all too brief victory afterglow, we knew - just a little - what supporting Liverpool or Arsenal was like.

The match itself was an apt finale to the players' at-the-limits struggle in reaching the mecca of English football, particularly given their League form. A fairytale first half performance and John Gayle's individual display was just enough against an understrength Tranmere with possible thoughts on promotion. Vince's juggling with the cup's lid during the presentation symbolised how nearly it had all been thrown away.

That it wasn't was a tribute, among other things, to the efforts of our young full-backs. Playing much of the game with an eye injury, John Frain's marking, tackling and general marshalling of the left flank said it all. If just one of his four timely penalty area interceptions hadn't been made it could have been a very different story. Shame he didn't get the media recognition he deserved. Ian Clarkson's pinpoint crossing and jinking wide runs were highlights of one of the most

impressive attacking performances from a full-back I've seen. The best moves of the afternoon came through Clarkson, including two of the three goals, with his service to John Gayle particularly outstanding. Witness his deep cross at 0-0 for Gayle to climb above Hughes and Higgins to head goalbound. Only Nixon's phenomenal save denied us. The same combo created the opening goal, with Clarkson's long ball met by Gayle who, outjumping Irons, flicked it into Sturridge's path. He breezed by both Hughes and Higgins and, with the help of a slight miskick, the 'keeper too. You could almost hear 45,000 skins being pinched as a collective fantasy suddenly blurred into reality. Frustrating then that Sturridge, felled by Brannan early in the second half, never had the chance to show what he was really capable of.

On the downside, old failings showed up too. A flat back four appealing for offside for instance, allowed a clever ball in behind them to go unopposed for Rover's first. Thomas's despairing attempt to narrow the angle, while Malkin squared the ball for Cooper to slide home, was hard to take. Meanwhile, Matthewson's penalty area neutering of Morrissey was positively painful and the simplicity of Jim Steel's headed equaliser against a static central defence bore all the hallmarks of some rain-sodden night in some far off town. Credit though to Martin Thomas, who, with the celebrations still going on after Gayle had made it 3-2, plucked the ball straight off Cooper's head to re-concentrate eleven minds and calm thousands of others.

Tranmere's second half tactical substitution emphasised how easily Blues can be overrun. With a more compact, competing midfield quartet, the Merseysiders soon began dominating the centre, picking up loose balls, varying their attacking options and boosting their goal tally. When the floodgates opened, Blues very ordinary midfield was simply washed away. John King's decision to start with a sweeper instead of 4-4-2 seemed more a fortunate mistake than the media acclaimed inspired double substitution.

Nigel Gleghorn's occasional sortees forward were a breath of fresh air amid all the huff-

The Match

ing and puffing. Once he devastatingly beat three opponents as if they were training cones before sliding the ball wide between the two approaching central defenders. In acres of space and with time to look up, Gayle then swung over a deep ball to the incoming Peer who, from point blank, somehow let Nixon turn it round the post. Aside from his poor touch and passing, lack of confidence in front of goal and, most noticeably, real shortage of pace, Peer ran and ran and then ran some more. Because of this his advocates considered him to have performed well and in that respect I suppose he did. Yet Yates and Robinson ran till they dropped but something a little more was quite rightly expected of them. Indeed it was Yates' decisive run and through ball for Gayle's first goal that's probably been played back on video a million times since.

The much-maligned centre forward looked too good to be playing in such a minor cup which he totally dominated. His goals - the first turning his defender on a sixpence to blast home from an acute angle, his second that overhead winning volley - were the icing on a performace of delectable sweeping passes, knock-downs and flicks. But for a wonderful Nixon save and misfortune with two glancing headers, his aerial blitz alone could have brought a hat trick. At 2-2 his hunger for the ball and harrying of flustered defenders was the perfect tonic to get the attacking momentum going again and not allowing heads to drop. The man even made important defensive headers for goodness sake!

Gayle was at the core of a team performing at its optimum. His goals stand out among such vivid images as the seconds that seemed a lifetime when the faithful realised Sturridge was clean through; Thomas's desperate save with his legs from Irons at 2-2 and the contrast between Morissey's tears and Macari and Bates' final whistle embrace. But the overriding memory of our 35 year reunion with Wembley was that, despite two seasons of Third Division mediocrity and boardroom mismanagement, Blues clinched one of the greatest finals the twin towers have ever seen - and in front of a level of support most English clubs can only dream about. It was undoubtedly the players and fans final; between them they highlighted how easily Blues could have more days like May 26th 1991 with only half the same commitment from the Board. The tragedy is the man most likely to achieve this has left with the same shattered dreams as the rest of us. And the image of Samesh Kumar, the man responsible for his departure, milking others achievements and rewards along the pitch's edge, still haunts me. Though it will never take away the good memories of a very special day in May.

Jim Bryant

Blues fans celebrate the Leyland DAF triumph

The Baker's Tale

There's nothing worse than the prospect of a party which you don't really want to attend. And that's precisely how I felt during the weeks of hype which preceded Blues trip to Wembley. As far as Birmingham City are concerned, I'm a child of the Cullis/ Goodwin era when over 30,000 regularly turned up, often witnessing some wonderfully entertaining matches. The success promised during that period was never delivered, yet (naively?) I cling to the belief that one day the club will reward its supporters for all those barren years - that our current sojourn in Division Three is but a 'blip' before Birmingham City is re-established in the top flight.

So, having reached the final of a competition that is the preserve of football's minnows, it seemed to me that everyone had taken leave of their senses. The

media wasted column inches/airtime galore in disingenuous camparisons with the 1956 Cup Final. The fans lapped up every Leyland DAF souvenir that the Kumar Empire could churn out - however tacky. It was an orgy of self-indulgence which saddened me in that it seemed to represent a willing acceptance of the club's new status in the soccer basement. So when I was asked to give the fans' perspective on the final for the Birmingham Post... well it was a bit like inviting Norman Tebbitt to pen a piece on behalf of the unemployed. But my ingrained cynicism disappeared on a day of high emotion.

I even bought a scarf, the first I'd worn since the Fulham Semi-Final in '75. It started to disintegrate after a few flaps out of the car window - but fortunately there was no shortage of blue and white on the motorway; just like old times. It seemed to me that many of the scarves on display hadn't seen the light of day since Francis was king of the Kop - something which applied to many supporters as well - but who cared? It was a great family day out with kids, grandparents, aunts and uncles all bedecked in club favours.

The Baker's Tale

Outside Wembley everyone mingled happily and the police just gave directions. Inside the stadium, almost from the minute the gates opened, the atmosphere was unbelievable.

The Junior Blues were cheered as conquering heroes after the penalty competition. The charity match, including Latchford, Taylor and Worthington, produced some good moments, but it was Jasper Carrott who received what must have been the greatest acclaim ever given to a celebrity footballer. With over 40,000 Blues supporters packed in, and the Tranmere end virtually empty, I began to feel some sympathy for the Merseysiders. Then I reminded myself of their return to Wembley the following weekend.

Backed by such an incredible following, Blues couldn't lose, and of course didn't. However, I had to temporarily re-scribble my notes midway through the second half until Gayle's unbelievable winner allowed me to re-instate them. A fitting climax to round off a thrilling match with the right result. A memorable day to lift the spirits of those of us that had suffered so many miserable St Andrews performances during the winter.

Heading north after the match, we were driving back to reality. Macari had inspired a Blues team, little more than mediocre in the League, to great heights with this one-off performance. And let's face it, the Leyland DAF Trophy has as much to do with real footballing achievement as a Kumar T-Shirt does to 'haute couture'. Tranmere returned to Wembley a week later for a contest of much greater significance. The importance of Blues' victory was in yielding much needed revenue and to display the great untapped potential of a club written off by so many. The Leyland DAF victory should signal the beginning of a Blues renaissance.

Sadly, those of us that have had any professional dealings with the club will doubt whether the present regime have the competence, let alone the commitment, to lift the club from Third Division obscurity. Recent events appear to re-inforce that view. It looks as if May 26th 1991 was yet another false dawn for Blues supporters.

It was a great day out, and after all my reservations I enjoyed the party. But like all good parties, it's been followed by a lengthy hangover.

Paul Baker

The Rovers' Tales

The letter requesting this article, dated May 23rd, asked for "my account on 40,000 Brummies cheering their side onto a glorious victory." Well, you got one thing wrong - it was 45,000. Apart from that, not bad.

Travelling to Wembley by tube, I felt just a touch out of place. There was I proudly wearing my 'Wembley 1991' special edition Rovers shirt, surrounded by navy blue and Jasper Carrott accents. Walking up Wembley Way a new game was invented - Spot a Fellow Tranmere Fan. It was starting to get embarrassing. However, it was cup final day and nothing was going to ruin the occasion. Well, not before the game anyway.

I went in about 1.30, just in time to see the first of the wonderful pre-match entertainments, the penalty shoot-out. We gave John Lesley, of Blue Peter fame, a little song and he gave us a wave. All very nice, all very Wembley. We won all the pre-match games that afternoon. Not even Carrott and Jeremy Beadle could stop the Tranmere Trollies, or whatever we were called, from winning the charity game. Nice losers lap of honour from Jasp. though.

But then the mood changed. Suddenly all the formalities of a Wembley final were over and the Leyland DAF Cup was up for grabs. 45 minutes later, and I was seriously considering packing it all in and buying a home in Chester! I don't think I've ever seen a half in which Rovers have been so utterly shite. Sure, City were playing good football, along the ground, nice passing etc..., but Tranmere were crap.

The questions about Eric Nixon's judgement for the first were probably still nagging in Steve Vickers' mind when he got turned all ends up by John Gayle for the second. How the same Nixon managed to keep us in the match just before the break I'll never know.

The second half didn't start much better, not for Rovers anyway, but then John King produced one of his once-a-season wonder substitutions. Suddenly, although we were still two down, we were pissing it. The ball was in our possession, on the deck, and inside the Blues half.

Then Cooper scored. Morrissey's flick through for Malkin to square to Coops was an absolute gem, even if the finish wasn't that conclusive. 1-2, and we were in with a chance.

We had all the pressure, all the ideas, and then an equaliser. A short corner, a quick interchange, far post cross and a bullet header from PC Jim Steel. 2-2 and a crack across the head from my mate which led to a two minute search for my glasses among partying Wirrallians. All good fun!

Suddenly the game had become the classic 'game of two halves' and, indeed, a classic. However the last five minutes did not go to plan. When Morrissey started one of his dazzling runs, hopes were that it would create the winner, but not at the other end. The knee in the bollocks he got in the box should have brought a penalty. Instead, almost immediately a foul in our half brought a blue free-kick and the rest is history.

Gayle's goal, it must be said, was an absolute stormer, the sort of goal that stays etched in the memory for years, the sort of goal that deserves to win any game, whether it be a knockaround in the park or the cup final. This one won the cup final. Yes, THE cup final. Winning the Leyland DAF last year felt like winning the FA Cup, and to clubs in the 3rd and 4th, it IS the FA Cup. No doubt that's how it felt to Blues fans on May 26th.

So my memories of my second Leyland DAF Cup Final: the huge number of Blues fans; our shit first half; our total transformation in the second; Jim Steel's header; finding my glasses!; how quiet 45,000 people can become at 2-2, and then how noisy they can become again at 3-2.

However, my main memory of Wembley is of course our Play Off victory over Bolton, and promotion, one week later. That must remain your priority. Enjoy the DAF triumph, get your picture taken with the trophy, but make sure of promotion this season.

Phil Moss

Forget Merseyside's big two - nowadays the local soccer scene must get used to a third major force - Tranmere Rovers. We've visited Wembley so regularly in recent years that Brent Council have sent us a Poll Tax reminder on our second home. This year's Leyland DAF Final was our fourth trip to the Twin Towers in three years but we looked forward to it just as much as before.

Once we'd beaten Preston 4-0 in the Northern Area Final First Leg the only real question was who would we rather play at Wembley - Brentford or Birmingham? I hoped it'd be Birmingham as this would guarantee a big crowd and a fine atmosphere - and so it came to be.

In Birkenhead the build up was fairly muted as Tranmere fans knew there'd be no shortage of tickets and, most importantly, all eyes were on the following Saturday's Play Off Final with Bolton. There was a general feeling that this year if we had to lose one it should be the Leyland DAF, as in 1990 we'd won the trophy and lost the Play-Off Final. Rumours emerged that Blues' ticket allocation had sold within hours and that some Brummies were trying to buy tickets from Rovers - as we would see on May 26th, quite a few succeeded.

So came the big day and we set off in a convoy of cars, coaches, mini-buses, vans etc., leaving Birkenhead around 7.30am singing: "Tell me Ma, me Ma, to put the champagne on ice, We're going to Wembley twice, Tell me Ma, me Ma!"

On the M6 we picked up the odd Birmingham car... then coach... then coaches, until we were totally outnumbered. We even contemplated squeezing in a couple of Blues fans whose West Midlands coaches had broken down (we counted six in all!) Reaching London we parked off the North Circular and looked for a pub. Trying to find one with other Tranmere fans in was impossible - they were all jam packed with Blues supporters singing "We hate Villa more than you" ... who are they anyway?

So we downed a quick half and walked up Wembley Way... what an atmosphere! I turned to a guy among thousands of Brummies and said "Do all your celebrating now mate, there won't be much to do later!" ... guess what, he supported Tranmere - how ironic.

Inside the ground was brilliant; from our seats the stadium looked full because we didn't really focus on our end! Then the teams appeared... what a proud moment that is, especially when five years before I was one of just 1,200 regulars at Prenton Park.

The match kicked off just after 3pm and predictably Tranmere let Blues come at them, which they did with telling effect; first Sturridge (what was Nixon doing?) and then Gayle with a great dummy and strike (I thought he could only use his head and elbows). Worries set in but Nixon made amends, pulling off a superb save just before half-time. If Tranmere were to be hammered, how would their confidence be for the Bolton game?

But what a second half! Steve Cooper pulled one back and then Jim Steel levelled the scores with a bullet-like header. Blues were being run ragged but could we get a third, afterall, the last thing Rovers wanted was extra time. Morrissey had the ball just inside the box - goes one way, then the other.... suddenly a knee connects with his balls .... PENALTY!! But the referee plays on. I turned to my mate and asked if that was the turning point. And sure enough Birmingham got back in the game and, with six minutes remaining, John Gayle produced a stunning overhead kick for the winner. So Vince Overson lifted the Cup to the accompaniment of hundreds of camera flashes. The Brummies celebrated and we offered applause, then left the scene. But were we down?... No way - Division Two was beckoning.

It was a good day out but if I was a Blues fan I'd be so frustrated - such massive latent support and in Division Three with Lou Macari departed. He said he'd only leave for a bigger club so he went to... Stoke City - what Division are they?

Ben Harrison

The Media's Tale

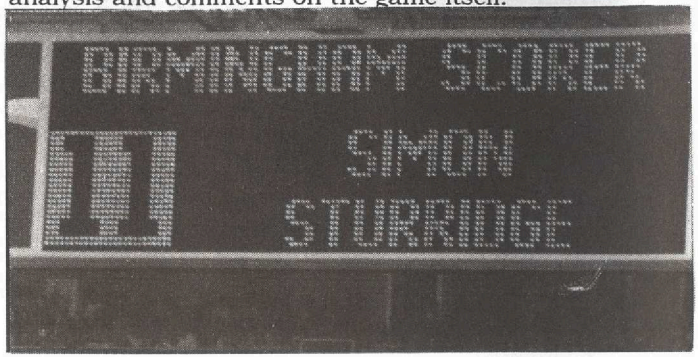
After 35 years a triumphant return to Wembley as Birmingham City win a trophy. 38?40?42?48? even 50 thousand fans witness an enthralling five goal thriller - what a tale to tell!

In the local press the pre-match build up largely consisted of the scramble for tickets. Fans weren't being allowed much chance to get over-excited as stories emanated from the papers of Kumar's cost-cutting plans and Celtic's link with Macari. But we were still full of optimism and anticipation, thinking along the same lines as Chic Bates, "this match is our beginning." The obligatory Mail Wembley Special was full of the usual big match build up and player profiles as alleged lifelong fanatic Jim Bryant told how "we can't wait to give Wembly a souped-up version of our famous old anthem."

Local radio was desperate not to miss out and each station endeavoured to put one over the other, though BRMB seemed to have greater access to the team. Their Sports Forum produced a platform for Macari adulation while WM staged an impromptu programme from the Club Shop on the Friday before the game. Another notable event was Samesh receiving a ticking off from Ed Doolan over the continuing ticket allocation saga.

Local TV joined in with Central running a daily series of features where we viewed the Open Day, Martin Thomas at home, and Samesh praised to high heaven. Meanwhile outside Brum the national press largely ignored the forthcoming event. Saturday's Evening Mail proclaimed 'Blues hit by injury blows' as news of Ian Rodgerson's injury broke - not happy reading, unlike the next morning's Mercury, 'Macari to stay', the back page headline which sent many on their merry way to Wembley. Tommy Docherty took on the role of killjoy, stating the competition was a "waste of time", with "Tranmere to win 3-1". Vince Overson echoed many fans feelings of the day "we must build on it", whatever happened to his own edict?

For anyone ticketless in Brum, both local radio stations had lengthy pre-match coverage and full commentary. Tom Ross conveyed the amazing scenes on the team coach as it journeyed down Olympic Way. Both interviewed Carrot talking a lot of sense on the event: "showing the board what the city is capable of". The commercial stations' coverage consisted of Gavin giving an emotive, if cliché-ridden commentary, but still better than expected. Sidekick Ross was on the team bench, further evidence of BRMB's advantageous links with the club, however Tom didn't really give much insight into matters of any relevance. The matchplay was frequently interrupted by Ross... as when Sturridge scored. BBC's coverage was more calm and collected with Tim Beech and Ian Winter, aided by Bob Hatton's knowledgeable comments on players and proceedings. There was more match analysis and comments on the game itself.



Over on BRMB the second goal stunned Gavin with a hysterical reaction unequalled on WM. George bellowed: "Don't tell me Tranmere can come back from this" although to be fair didn't everyone feel the same at that moment?

At half-time WM attempted to gain fans' reactions through Simon Brotherton, permanently based somewhere on pitchside. One rather hard to please fan surmised "I don't think they're playing that well actually."

Rovers fightback was covered well by WM with more analysis of tactical switches and the pattern of the game, largely put forward by Hatton. At 2-1 Gavin stated "the Tranmere fans are now singing - but you can't hear 'em'" and "Blues fans even talking to their neighbour would drown the Tranmere support." Further to this "their No. 9 is struggling" - but soon it's 2-2 and Jim Steel, the man "who was hobbling a few moments ago" has scored. Back on WM they almost missed the equalizer because of touchline talk - listening you wouldn't have known it came from a corner.

The panic that ensued was fully expressed on BRMB with Blues described as teetering on the edge, tired and spent. For Gavin "John Gayle has gone..." His legs have completely gone underneath him". With hindsight a bit of a boob!

At crisis point WM remained professionally calm "the youngsters look tired" as "Blues are in all sorts of trouble". The (non) penalty incident

The team go up for the cup

was overlooked with Morrissey said to have lost possession to Peer (not Yates). Gavin delicately described it as an "accidental knee in the groin". The winner left even Tim Beech lost for words while, with 4 minutes to go, Gavin and Ross began a dialogue on "whether this is better than sex."

Both stations covered the lifting of the trophy and lap of honour. Players were interviewed and Samesh heartily thanked Lou who, when questioned, evaded doubts over his future.

In summary, the victory was seen as having a 'unifying effect on players' with talk of 'fans scurrying to St. Andrews next season'!

The match provided an excellent advert for Sky TV who showed the whole 90 minutes twice that Sunday evening. Unfortunately there were no highlights of earlier rounds and not much pre-match build up. Thankfully this meant very little waffle and all in all a high standard of coverage.

It felt very strange seeing Blues covered in such depth on TV. Ex-star soccer man Peter Brackley gave an incisive performance behind the mic. backed by Ron Atkinson. Love or most probably loathe him, he does know what he's on about and made some good points.

Both men showed a feel for the club and it's followers, "maybe this is the start of something big for Birmingham City"..."I shouldn't think there's anyone left in Birmingham today" and "Blues fans can hardly contain their excitement" as we watched an excellent side-on camera angle.

The coverage wasn't radically different from BBC/ITV football, straightforward with few frills. The controversial moment before the winner was seen firstly as obstruction, then something worse - "Yates caught him full on."

The star of the show was undoubtedly Big Bad John. Awarded man of the match, "the most unlikely hero of all". Atkinson sounded stunned at his performance, "I don't know what he's been

taking but this is not the Gayle I've seen over the years." The post-match interview with Gayle was one to beat them all. Flag over shoulder, wearing Blues hat and wide fixed grin, John deliriously spouted 'now what I means,' a bleeped out expletive and at one point mentioned "Blues getting the points." The fans were "my bubblers" and, when given the award and asked about the winner, he wandered off leaving an utterly bewildered and confused young interviewer. What a star!

The lap of honour was screened and we saw bearded Bimal Kumar - probably for the first time ever. Andy Gray was a panelist and competently analysed the match, assessing the future thus: "Birmingham have potentially bigger crowd support than Villa" with "a great incentive for the people who run the club, the Kumar brothers, to them back to the top, where they'll get that kind of support". Too true.

As expected the local papers covered the game in great detail and reported on every aspect. The blanket coverage normally reserved for Villa was now given to Blues. The Birmingham Post pull-out Sports Section front page showed Gayle with the Cup. Andy Colquhoun marshalled the papers' response with a match report and post-match comment: "Wembley showed they shouldn't be in Division Three."

Although concerned about the club building for the future the papers were eager to quote Macari': "I think I will be manager of Birmingham City next season - unless they sack me." Tabloids gave little, if any space to the event, but The Guardian grudgingly acknowledged "those notorious under-achievers of football" and "the Birmingham victory a triumph of tenacity over superior technique." The Independent's Phil Shaw wrote an article with a greater sense of empathy.

The North West press agreed it was a memorable game and gave John Gayle fair credit. A Jeckyll and Hyde performance from Tranmere was emphasized as was the (non) penalty incident with the Rover's player "kneed in the unmentionables" and the free-kick which lead to the winner "another controversial decision". Great credance, or perhaps excuses, was given to the importance of the play-off match which "the fans rate far more in importance."

The Civic Reception merited plenty of space in the local newspapers and provided many photo opportunities. Radio WM covered the event while Tom and George seemed at times to be conducting it! On Monday both BBC1 and ITV local news not only had pictures of the reception but also limited coverage of the big day itself.

Post-Wembley the Evening Mail immediately brought into question Kumars' fight to keep Macari, and The Express and Star mentioned "the two men struggling to conceal their dispute." The Mail's Souvenir 'Wembley Wonders' was what one would expect including some good photographs, especially of the team coach approaching Wembley. Taking full advantage, a Wembley scroll was produced, a questionable marketing ploy at £1 a time, used again this pre-season. In the Souvenir issue hero Gayle was quoted on Lou, "he has got to stay, if we want to go anywhere. He has started somthing at the club and it would be stupid to let it go to waste."

A scene from the Civic Reception

And so the tale was told by TV, radio, and press, a grand story with a final twist and a not so happy ending.

Hugh O'Sullivan

THE CIVIC RECEPTION

Well Vera, thank cricket it was a nice day - 'else we'd never have seen t'cup. Yes, I remember the moment - an explosion of light as the sun caught the feminine curves of the trophy herself, coquettishly, bashfully hiding behind a morass of backroom staff, Brothers and radio reporters.

To avoid craning my neck up at the proceedings, I'd come on stilts: "I've supported 'em 75 years and I'm not going to miss this. Besides, it's like when I go to a gig - the tallest haircut always stands right in front of me." So keen was I to see the Civic Reception that I'd been kipping out since Saturday night to ensure a prime spot at the front - it had worked and was I feeling proud of myself! Perched a clear 10ft above the Council House balcony I looked straight into the Mayoral office just in time to see his Highness throttling an office junior with his gold chain while stabbing him in the lower body with the mace and sceptre.

The throng in Victoria Square, now numbering around a million, were being caroused with vintage recordings from the Ringmeister of Sporting Ceremonies at Birmingham's leading American radio station. In true dictator style, the balcony and square were bedecked, bedizened and decorated with large photographs of a paternalistic looking George. His mother, I thought, would be resonably proud.

A short gazelle ride away the topless bus bearing yesterday's men sped through the silent, deserted backstreets of Duddeston, Nechells, Aston (were they bragging or hoping?) and Newtown. Petrol was running low and there were still a dozen or more postal codes to do. The players mused: "For years the fans have been singing to the world and his concubine how they'll be running round the Bull Ring with the cup - it was an obvious route: Coventry Road - Digbeth - Bull Ring - New Street - Lord Mayor's Parlour; so why are we doing a tour of industrial estates and tower blocks? "Every so often George's 1,000 megaton voice boomed out another John Gayle bicycle kick for the whole of the West Midlands to rejoice in, but still the bus seemed to get no nearer. It was as frustrating as living next to a brothel holding a happy hour when you've drunk ten pints.

Looking down on the throng, it was VE night, New Year's Eve and the Last Night of the Proms all rolled into one. I'd just relieved myself but nothing was going to dampen the crowd's spirits. Using a pair of binoculars made to a classic 1970's John Noakes design and some 3D glasses given free in TV Times, I spied the player's coach approach. Swinging into Colmore Row it surged down the final straight before suddenly coughing, wheezing and spluttering to death 50 yards short of its target, gas all played out. The cheers that had greeted its gladatorial-like entrance turned to stupefaction - yet again it seemed Blues had failed to keep right on to the end of the road. But the crowd's enthusiasm carried the players, backroom staff and trophy shoulder high onto the balcony where George greeted each one with an unforgettable tongue dive. With the opportunism of a scouser, Samesh took the microphone: "We'll show you the cup, but it'll cost you each £1 every time a player holds it up - pay at the kiosk by the Town Hall." The trophy went on tour - Tom Ross gave it to Samesh, Samesh gave it to Joan Hill, then on to Ramesh, to the Lord Mayor, to Tom Ross, to George, to the stone lions garlanding the front of the Council House, to Ashok Kumar, to Tom Ross, to Eric Partridge, to Tom Ross, to John Westmancoat, to Ken Wheldon (!), to... we didn't see it after that, I guess 'cos the balcony was so full. The players forced their way through the revellers to soak up the crowds' adulation and throw momentoes at their fans. They'd waited so long for this - at last a chance to dispose of those bloody shell suits! George and Tom summoned each player to the microphone. Big crap John read a passage from Joyce's Ulysees and Hoppy was sick. But every man Jack was fulsome in his praise for Dave Mackay and Bobby Ferguson - the Peter Skipper o.g. that beat Walsall had taken years of planning. Birmingham City's are a knowledgeable crowd and now they responded with even greater fervour: "We want Supermac" soon became "There's only one Annie Bassett" then "Willie Bell, go to hell" as the legends of the past were paid due reverence.

Like the scene on Buck Palace balcony on Royal Wedding Day, Samesh and Joan stepped forward to give one last wave. The crowd began dispersing - off to start a thousand parties and a hundred pub brawls. And for the players the real treat - awaiting each of them was a handsome slice of Samesh's very special Chocolate Sponge Cake and a P45 - yummy!

Ned the Nobtosser

After The Lord Mayor's Show

Our football club is very sick. Its finances a wreck, right from the top its management seems at best shoddy, at worst incompetent and its future is deep mid-winter bleak.

For two years we have reserved judgement on the Kumar Brothers. Yes they made gaffes, but these often seemed born more of naivety than malice and that same inexperience allowed a fresh approach and style that accommodated some (for this industry) much-needed boardroom creativity - meet the Chairman evenings, screening the Brentford game, re-opening the Tilton etc.

But our feelings of generousity have evaporated. The hostility and ill-will towards the club's management by so many who deal with them cannot, IS NOT, purely sour grapes, personal vendettas or greed. In Birmingham City's plight, financial acumen is a virtue and a gung-ho spend, spend, spend attitude could prove fatal. But the litany of dissatisfied customers, of people feeling neglected, exploited, ripped off is much, much too high - in fact it's shameful. For too many, doing business with Birmingham City is no longer a pleasure, it's a chore and one that large numbers seem unwilling to repeat. None more than those still waiting to be paid. The case of Roy Nichol, who supplied the match videos, has been publicly aired already but, with legal action pending, others declined to talk. Often those that are paid only receive their money after considerable hassle. At the start of last season on Jim Caffery volunteered to edit the club programme. He employed a photographer who the club offered to pay £30 for 4.5 hours work per match, but he had to supply and develop the film himself. Caffery resigned after 8 games, saying the club gave him little help and were very unprofessional. At that point the photographer still hadn't been paid. These facts, and claims that writs are pending against the club for non-payment of debts are highly damaging to its business reputation. But a recent Birmingham Chamber of Commerce report on the club is more damning still. It states the club takes an average of 88 days to pay its debts and has a credit limit of zero: Further "In view of the subject's INSOLVENCY (our capitals)... we are reluctant to justify the advancing of credit to this company and suggest you seek suitable assurances from the Directors". i.e. keep away!

The Council are fed up with the Kumars, the press are fed up with the Kumars, turnstile operators car park attendants, police officials, the kit suppliers - all have criticised their running of Blues, while despite Wembley success at least 16 Executive Members of Box Holders have not renewed. One, J.H. Evans report: "We are amazed and saddened at the complete lack of direction and basic management skills in the administration of the club...the attitude of the Kumars is completely alien to our view on how a football club should be run." These people can't all be wrong!

And if they're getting a raw deal, then what about the supporters! We expect - and indeed approve - high profile marketing of such a major occasion as the Leyland DAF Final but ethics went out the window the moment we reached Wembley. Those fans who queued in the rain for up to seven hours that Monday to buy tickets might well testify to that. Ticket distribution, even allowing for the club's inexperience in such matters, was shocking and seemed designed around raking in the most revenue possible. Charging £3 for an OPEN DAY! Complaints about the quality of merchandise. Those strangely QPR-like blue and white hooped shirts that suddenly appeared (and so soon after Influence's contract at Loftus Road had ended) - prime examples of how to aggravate further a support that was alienated long, long ago. Yes, 45,000 or so went to Wembley, supported and loved Birmingham City, but large numbers were saying: "one last chance Blues; Mansfield, Crewe, Shrewsbury in the League, you don't deserve us for that, but Wembley, ok, we've earned this."

And now they all feel cheated. One man above all is to blame - Samesh Kumar. His inability to back a manager, who if nothing else, had become a folk hero and pumped life and pride back into the club, is a cross he will bear very publicly, for a very long time. Even before the Final it was clear that Macari was getting well pissed off. He claims to have been told that while there was no money available, if he could generate some then he could spend it. If that is true - and we believe it is - then that promise was clearly renegad on. Now Samesh Kumar takes every opportunity to rubbish the man who gave him his greatest day out, his biggest ever ego trip as a football club chairman, knowing full well that Macari is unlikely to hit back. Disgraceful.

We are tired and weary of seeing our football club run this way. WE WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE KUMARS AND THE BCCI. We want to know how much the club made from Wembley. We are worried that the two may be too closely linked. We are not convinced or reassured that Birmingham City aren't just an easy outlet for the Kumars' clothing empire. Why did they want to hold Sunday markets at St. Andrews? Why was one of their few investments at Blues refurbishing the Influence-goods packed Soccer Shop? Are Influence cash rich, as Eric Partridge claims, or will they suddenly call in

the extended credit we're told they've given Blues?
Most of all we want to know how the owners intend dragging the club out of the deep, deep hole it is in. Where Don Revie told a comatose Leeds to emulate Real Madrid, the Kumars quote Southend or Cambridge. Where Aston Villa - a club we were thumping only a few seasons back - are selling and signing for millions, the Kumars are getting 34-year old free transfers, and Irish part-timer and assorted rejects. Where Villa plan an £8m stand, we get a few schoolkids and dole boys down and give them a broom and a paintbrush.
English football in 1991 is a harsh, often unforgiving world and with the Super League threatened if you're left out of it, you really are left out of everything worth being in. This is by no means all the Kumars fault but their anti-Poll Tax philosophy; 'Can't Pay - Won't Pay' is sure as damn it guaranteeing that the Autoglass Trophy will be the limit of our ambitions - hell, three and a half months after it was first mooted, they haven't even got an opinion on the Super League!
The Kumar dynasty must either find the funds necessary to put our football club back on course (maybe by enlisting a partner) or get out. But their business practices MUST change, they're losing the club friends, goodwill, supporters and sponsors.
If they don't, then Terry Cooper's talents in a lousy Third Division will be largely wasted. He needs some of that Wembley windfall so cruelly denied his predecessor. Without the Leyland DAF triumph, Birmingham City might be that much closer to meeting the Official Receivers. The club's underlying financial problems are clearly as acute as ever - we won't get near our 12,000 break-even crowd and somewhere money has got to be found to redevelop St. Andrews before we can even think of playing in a higher division.
Birmingham City lie like a fish in a desert, gasping for breath. The longer the Kumar brothers remain silent, the louder its death rattle sounds.

All I Want Is The Truth

There's only so much you can do with a football club's commercial department and, in my time with Blues, I attempted to exploit every avenue in trying to raise much-needed revenue for "my" football team.
However, Third Division soccer isn't conducive to attracting major companies and although St. Andrews afforded better facilities than most at this level, there's still little to draw big sponsorships. Therefore Blues' executive boxes wouldn't attract uncommitted entrepreneurs, only local businessmen who supported the club anyway.
This didn't satisfy Samesh Kumar, who explained to me he didn't want any Birmingham City supporters in the boxes, only major companies with plenty of cash. This remarkably naive statement didn't surprise me as the same man thought our playing status wouldn't affect our marketing potential. He was effectively saying Blues would be attractive to sponsors whatever division they were in.
The truth is that support at any level must rub shoulders with success, and even though Blues have a healthy hardcore support who'd follow them at any level, anywhere, everyone would be happier watching a winning team. Is any further proof needed than Wembley?
Writing this, I've been listening to BRMB's Sports Forum in which Tom Ross interrogated, sorry, interviewed Steve Jones and Theresa Smyth of the Blues Action Group. I was very disappointed at the way Tom conducted the programme, his bias was obvious. His blinkered approach and censorship was sad because surely it's only right Blues fans know the club's true plight and solid information should be publicised whatever its source. Problems shouldn't be glossed over and if this chairman can't fund the now laughable 'Re-birth of the Blues' then he should make way for someone who can and will.
I understand the club is £2.5m in debt, this two and half years into the Kumars' much-vaunted five year plan aimed at getting the club back to Division One - looks grim doesn't it? There are many grey areas that need bringing into the open. For instance, when questioned on BRMB, Samesh Kumar was adamant that the BCCI crash wouldn't affect Blues. Well, these are extracts from the Financial Times, 11th July 1991: "BRS Kumar Ltd, which has banked with BCCI for more than 14 years... Mr Ramesh Kumar, who with brothers Bimal and Samesh controls the company.. said "as of 4.30 last Friday we were not allowed to function as a commercial enterprise"... "Nothing has been given to ensure that companies like ours can CARRY ON TRADING". (my block capitals). From Mr Bryan Slater (former Blues Director and the Kumar's company solicitor): "This has had a terrible effect on the company... It has caused them a huge headache."
Is it true (all people want is the truth) that the company has a £5m loan from the BCCI, part-secured by Birmingham City shares? If so, isn't it the case, should the receivers call in such loans, that the Kumar Brothers wouldn't be able to meet them? The parent company (BRS Kumar Brothers Ltd) would then be forced into liquidation, taking Blues with it.
There's so much more that needs to be asked and answered - for instance, why is Junior Blues membership down 75%? Why are sponsors and executive members deserting the club? Before the blaze why was Elmdon allowed to be run down to a near-derelict position, especially when it was rent free? Why is there such a huge turnover of staff? What is Blues short-term, never mind long-term, future?
I know you've had offers for the club Samesh, why deny it? I say get off your egotistical pedestal, think only of Blues and their supporters and come clean.

Peter Brannan
Dedicated Blues supporter

BLUES ACTION GROUP

The Blues Action Group was conceived in the frustration of yet again seeing Birmingham City shoot themselves in the foot. Only 22 days after Wembley we lost Lou Macari, arguably one of the club's best managers of the last two decades.

It was obvious to me that cracks were starting to appear well before May 26th. I attended BRMB's Sports Forum at the Yew Tree in Yardley on May 14th. From comments Lou made, and I quote: "I would like to make a big attempt to get out of the Third Division but at this moment in time I am not too confident of being allowed to do that" it seemed major problems were looming. I stated on this programme that if the chairman wasn't prepared to back the manager then he should sell the club to someone who was.

Steve Jones - Chairman

The euphoria of winning the Leyland DAF had hardly died down when press reports re-surfaced that Macari would leave. Meanwhile players were refusing to sign contracts and were openly critical of the terms offered them. Then, on June 13th, I got a 'phone call from Theresa Smyth. We'd never spoken before but she remembered me from the Sports Forum and had managed to track me down. Recalling the points I'd raised that night she asked if I'd help her form an action group. I agreed and we decided we must try to persuade Lou to stay and reckoned one way of doing this was to start a petition. So Theresa went to BRMB and demanded to be interviewed to publicise our intentions. Neither of us had ever done anything like this before and, to our amazement, they agreed to put Theresa on air. She announced that we'd be collecting a petition at the ground on Saturday June 15th to try and keep Lou Macari and press for a change of ownership.

Despite atrocious weather we collected 6,000 signatures while the chairman was sunning himself in Portugal. The following day Theresa made several attempts to 'phone Lou Macari. He finally returned her call at a quarter past midnight. Lou was extremely touched to think that so many fans had turned out to support him. Unfortunately we were too late - the decision had already been made and, with Samesh Kumar on holiday, there was no possibility of further discussions. Clearly the manager's comments on the Sports Forum the month before were

now ringing true.

Although Lou had departed the group decided to press on and call for new owners. We hired Birmingham Town Hall and invited the Chairman and Vice-Chairman along to explain to fans why the club was in such turmoil so soon after Wembley. Yet again they displayed contempt for the supporters by refusing to attend. Despite this, on June 25th, in the dead of close season, over 800 fans turned up to the meeting, at which three motions were carried:

1. To represent the feelings of all supporters to Birmingham City
2. To carry on this action group in the form of an independent supporters organisation
3. To press for a change of ownership of the club

On Saturday July 6th fans were invited to join the Action Group - some 400 did - and ten days a further meeting democratically elected a fifteen-strong committee.

Our aim now is to go forward with the best interests of Blues fans at heart, campaigning on matters such as ID cards, faulty merchandise and fixture arrangements (eg Darlington away on Boxing Day). In the past Blues supporters have had no formal mechanism for making their feelings known to the club's owners - we intend to fill that role. So far the Chairman has refused either to debate the club's problems with us publicly or sit down in his office and talk things through privately. For someone who regularly tells us how much he cares about Blues supporters, we find his response to the Action Group incredible.

Theresa Smyth - Secretary

The Blues Action Group is open for ALL fans to join and our policy will be determined by our membership. Meeting are held at Hay Mills Social Club, Coventry Road, Hay Mills - financial contributions are welcome. If you've any expertise to offer us (typing, photocopying services etc) or if you want to get involved in organising our activities then please let us know. Alternatively, if you just wish to become a member then naturally you'll be welcome - an application form is attached.

The people who run our football club should be accountable to those who keep it going - ie US! The Blues Action Group gives fans a forum to both help the club and tell them what we want with honest criticism and constructive ideas. We are not a lynch mob but simply true Blues supporters with the good of the club at heart.

Steve Jones, Chairman
Blues Action Group

To join the Blues Action Group write to; 16 Nayland Croft, Birmingham B28.

Eric Partridge Interview 8.8.1991

Eric Partridge, recently appointed Blues' General Manager (a role similar to that Anne Bassett had - but don't hold that against him) talks to Steve Beauchampé and Hugh O'Sullivan. As well as working for the club he supports, Partridge, founder of Football Today magazine and until recently a Radio WM football reporter, is head of the Kumars' Influence International leisurewear company, now based at St. Andrews after moving from offices above the Soccer Shop.

John Westmancoat is very knowledgeable, a very respected figure within football and a vital member of the Blues' backroom team. A man of his ability would be very hard to replace.

Tired and Weary: Where have the club's biggest failings been recently?

Eric Partridge: Communications. Even prior to the Kumars there were the most horrendous problems just obtaining basic information from the club. The telephone system is so archaic - it's totally unacceptable. But it's being upgraded and we're bringing in a full-time receptionist. We've never looked after the media properly. Until I arrived we never sent out press releases - that's vital in dealing with the press.

TAW: The Kumars have been here over two years, why haven't they addressed these problems?

EP: Because we've never had a full-time Chairman. The club has been run on a shoestring for too many years. Annie Bassett arrived but the communication problem remained. Now Samesh is full-time Chairman and Chief Executive - unpaid...

TAW: To be fair he gets a wage from the club's parent company, BRS Kumar Brothers Limited, he's not signing on the dole.

EP: No, but he pays his own expenses and takes no renumeration... but these problems have built up over the years and were partly inherited. They won't be addressed overnight. But we've drawn up a business plan and community strategy and individual areas of the club now have budgets.

TAW: What is the state of play with John Westmancoat?

EP: John Westmancoat is very knowledgeable, a very respected figure within football and a vital member of the Blues' backroom team. A man of his ability would be very hard to replace.

TAW: There's a feeling that Birmingham City have been a very difficult club to deal with - the Council and some previous club employees have highlighted this. How can the problem be tackled?

EP: It concerns me and it's quite puzzling. We bear the City's name and you'd think the Council would bend over backwards to help. We've just paid off an £89,000 instalment (including £39,000 interest) on the loan they gave when Ken Wheldon was in charge. But then Villa get a £.5m GRANT to build a coach park. Why? Is it because the Council have had such a difficult time with the club in the past? It's something I'd like to get to grips with and talk to Bryan Bird about. There are certain factions at the Council who seem anti-Blues and I'd like to discover why.

TAW: There are stories of suppliers not being paid - one report says as many as 42 writs are pending against the club.

EP: That figure is incorrect.

TAW: Is it more or less?

EP: It's less, a lot less. It's impossible unless writs have been issued and gone through the legal system for anyone to discover this figure. Which leads me to believe that somebody had access to it to impart the information in the first place. But cash flow is a major problem - Blues are owed a lot of money but the Kumars have put a £.5m interest-free loan in. Ken Wheldon says Blues were in the black when he sold it, that wasn't the case. The man ripped the

heart out of this club and walked away with £500,000.

TAW: What's our current financial situation?

EP: The bottom line is that we're in a healthier state now than when the Kumars arrived. By that I mean that the value of the players has increased. Simon Sturridge was just a YTS kid two years ago; within 6-12 months clubs could be offering £500-750,000 for him - and this applies to other youngsters. So they are assets we have. Six of the Wembley side came through the youth team.

TAW: But fans don't want to see them sold. Look at the outcry when Kevin Ashley left and he wasn't the greatest player we've ever had. His sale seemed to signify the club's acceptance of its Third Division status. We just can't go on selling our best players.

EP: That was a brilliant fee for Ashley, but if supporters feel that strongly about the financial plight, why don't they come here like they went to Wembley? Our break-even crowd is 12,000. Look what happened days after we beat Brentford - we played Mansfield and just 7,000 came. I couldn't believe it!

TAW: We have just finished in our lowest ever League position and the quality of football hasn't justified big crowds.

EP: I agree. If you're a neutral living in Solihull with the choice of Coventry v Liverpool or Blues v Chester you'll choose Coventry.

TAW: It's been said that the Kumars had a £5m overdraft facility with the BCCI, partly secured against St.Andrews; also that the club shop used to bank with the BCCI.

EP: A company the size of the Kumars' doesn't put all its eggs in one basket. They use several banks - it doesn't pay to let one bank know too much about you. The club shop is with one of the big High Street banks and the £5m overdraft suggestion is absolute rubbish. Certainly this ground has not been used as security. The collapse of the BCCI doesn't affect Birmingham City because the club doesn't bank with them.

TAW: There was a story that we were to sign a major sponsorship deal.

EP: One potential sponsor - and it wouldn't be fair to name them - one of their associated companies lost lots of money in the BCCI. We had a lot of negotiations and the company concerned were right behind us but pen was never put to paper and it had to be called off.

TAW: How much did the club make from reaching Wembley?

EP: Most of the details will be in the Annual Report - we've got provisional figures which I'm not in a position to give you but there's still some money to come in from various sources. We did a stock take in the club shop last week and the levels are horribly high. This is largely because we expected to sell lots of merchandise after Wembley but the bubble burst when Lou Macari left and sales went from four figures per day to the very, very low hundreds.

Eric Partridge

The Blues Action Group have called on fans to boycott Influence-branded leisurewear but I don't see the point because the Kumars haven't billed the club for the goods they've supplied - it's yet another form of a loan. If the Kumars weren't behind the club then Blues would be paying for these goods.

TAW: So Influence International hasn't invoiced Birmingham City for the Wembley merchandise?

EP: No. Because Influence International is cash rich it can afford to give Blues extended credit. The only cost to the club is that of manufacturing. Influence have taken no mark up.

TAW: But what if they wanted their money and the club hadn't got it?

EP: I don't think the Kumars would put Blues in that position. They have the club at heart and know that you have to make your money work for you. Their husbandary of Birmingham City's finances has been so careful. Maybe when the club has a bit of loose change they'll ask for some - but really they're not overly concerned whether or when the club pay.

TAW: What will the mark up be

to Blues on a £25 Wembley commemorative shirt when the bills are eventually paid? Might it be say £23 to the Kumars and just a couple of quid to Blues? We ask because it worries some supporters that the two companies are so closely linked, sharing staff and premises.

EP: With the Wembley shirts, Influence bore the manufacturing costs. Our normal mark up is about 60% but with Blues there'd only be a 10% handling charge - that's all. I'm a Blues fan. I've seen people mistreat and abuse this club; I've seen people walk away from this club with £.5m after ripping the heart out of it. I feel so strongly about the way it's been run and there's no way I'll stand by and watch Blues get ripped off by the Kumars or anybody.

TAW: Why are Stoke City selling Influence-produced 'We're On The March With Lou Macari' T-Shirts?

EP: OK, I hold my hand up. That was a pure marketing opportunity. In retrospect perhaps we should have waited for the dust to settle, but we were approached by Stoke. It was 100 shirts and they've come back for more. I apologise if it's offended anybody. It wasn't done under the Kumars' direction and I got hauled over the coals because of it.

TAW: Why did Lou Macari leave?

EP: I don't know Lou that well - you never could get to know quite how he was thinking. My own opinion is that he used Blues as a stepping stone. I don't think he ever intended staying and he was interested in the Celtic and Sheffield Wednesday jobs.

TAW: Surely the club broke promises to him over cash availability for team strengthening?

EP: Well money is there but I don't know how much. We've sold or released some players recently which reduces the wage bill. We sold Dennis Bailey - only a fringe player last season - Lou wanted to let him go for £80,000 but Samesh said that wasn't enough and in the end we got 160,000. I know from talking to Bill Coldwell that that money is untouched.

TAW: Yesterday Keith Curle was sold for £2.5m - an example of the absurd level of transfer fees. To clear Blues' debts (probably around £1.5 - £2m), build a team to make us even an average First Division club (where promotion may soon be limited to one club per season), make the stadium comply with the Taylor Report and Super League requirements of 20,000 seats is likely to cost around £8 - £10m. How do we do it?

EP: It's a horrendous thought. Building a team is down to the manager's skill. We have a good youth policy, which is what George Graham has at Arsenal - they won the League with six home-grown players. The youngsters are out there - Lee Sharpe and Alan Smith were locals for instance - but we must spot them. Ken Wheldon forced his managers to sell our stars. In about a year, John Gayle could be worth loads but we want to build a team around players like Gayle and Paul Tait and hopefully not have to spend a lot. Nevertheless, we must be honest, if Liverpool come in for one of our players, they'll go.

TAW: The problem is we'll end up like Bolton and Burnley, once big clubs, forever selling our stars. How else do we raise money?

EP: Off-field activities. We must use all our facilities to generate revenue. A religious group wish to hold a three-day event here, that's £20 - £30,000. We wanted to hold a car boot sale every Sunday but the Council prevented us - that's about £250,000 a year we could have used to strengthen the squad. Then there's the Football Trust - the police control box cost £100,000 - the Trust contributed around 70%. If it makes the ground safer then that can help increase crowds and bring back more families. So can the membership card system. We will have a matchday creche, but we must upgrade our facilities to offer the club out for functions. I'm talking to a major brewery about turning the old big Supporters Club room into a Cabaret and Nightclub at a cost of £250,000 functions appealing to locals.

TAW: With respect, isn't this just scratching the surface? Don't we need massive investment from either the Brothers or others?

EP: This is a First Division ground really but it needs upgrading. That will take money. I can't answer whether the owners would find that but I do know that we should be getting more aid from the local authority. Why aren't they living up to the City's motto 'Forward'? When it comes to assisting this club they are backward. Bryan Bird told us: "You win something, you help the local

community and we'll help you" - instead they put us under severe financial pressure in recalling the loan - and if that's helping then I'm a chocolate teacake.

TAW: Birmingham City are a subsidiary of BRS Kumar Brothers Limited. Samesh says he wants to build the club, isn't it reasonable for fans to ask him to finance its re-birth or find people to partner him? After all Birmingham City could have gone bankrupt if they hadn't reached Wembley.

EP: So people have told me, though that's not an official club view. It'd be easy for Samesh to say: "Here's another £.5m". But why should he? We employ staff to generate money for this club. We have to be seen to be winning things. The Kumars have already paid £.5m for the club and given that much again in loans. If we can generate money by involving business then maybe that will encourage the Brothers to invest, but they've no bottomless pit of money. Lots of businesses latched onto Wembley; many gave Joan Hill hell over tickets - bandwagon merchants. Where are they week in, week out? Am I being naive?

TAW: Turning to the Super League, what is the club's response to it - we've yet to hear a word from them.

EP: We haven't discussed it, we've been concentrating on getting the new season up and running. As a Third Division club as far as I can see there's nothing we can do to oppose it. I don't even know my own thoughts on it, I haven't looked at the FA blueprint.

TAW: Don't you think you should have thought about it by now?

EP: When the Chairman comes back from Ireland I'll talk to him and before the season kicks off we'll have a policy on it which we'll publish in the programme. As a fan, in our current plight I see it as another example of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. But if this club has any ambition it should get off its arse to try and become part of that Super League.

TAW: What's happening about ground redevelopment?

EP: Talks have taken place with Superstadia - a report is due in September - and there are proposals available for anyone to see. But the Board are committed - and I mean committed - to staying at St. Andrews. It's our home and I for one couldn't imagine playing anywhere else. The problems of turning St. Andrews into an all-seater, which we're being forced to do, are major, but they're no insurmountable.

TAW: How do you feel about the Blues Action Group?

EP: Not bothered about it at all. It was formed on a wave of emotion to keep Lou Macari and I can relate to that. I'd welcome the opportunity to speak to any supporters' representatives but there's no need for 'Action Groups' and 'Kumar Out' etc. I was a member of the Blue Revolution in 1978 - that came to nothing, so did a later one and, without wishing to be disrespectful, I believe the same thing will happen this time. But we'd like a relationship with some sort of supporters' group, not an antagonistic relationship that's a witch-hunt or a lynch mob, but something positive and constructive. I'd like to see a monthly supporters' forum. After all, who's to say the Kumars are right? The Action Group made a point. I think if they'd come and offered £10m we'd probably have listened to them.

Blues are on their way to Wembley

THE SUPER LEAGUE

The FA's Professional Foul

Q. Which team finished in their lowest ever league position last season, but still won the highest honour they will ever achieve in future?

A. (If the Football Association have their way) Birmingham City.

The F.A's plans to create an elite 'Super League' mean, at a stroke, that Blues, who not so long were regular visitors to Anfield, Old Trafford and White Hart Lane will now forever be consigned to dreaming of Autoglass Cup glory.

The proposal strikes at the heart of what English football is all about - the idea that, no matter how bad your team is now, one day they could be playing in the top division, and become the best team in the world. It's often referred to as 'The Dream Factor', but it's more than that.

In the last 30 years, half the League clubs have played in the First Division, and in the past decade, nearly 40 (which is a full league in many European countries) have competed at the top level. By drawing a line at an arbitrary point in time, the FA have dictated that Villa but not Blues, Luton but not Watford, Notts County but not Leicester, Norwich but not Ipswich, will be considered to be a 'big club'. Taken at another time, the decision could have been the other way round.

Make no mistake, if the Super League gets going as its proponents intend, there'll be very little, if any, promotion and relegation between the top division and the rest. Even the one up, one down, and one possible extra place via a play-off, is qualified by the ridiculous stipulation that, to play in the top league, a club must have 20,000 seats. At the moment, clubs all over are struggling to meet Lord Justice Taylor's recommendations. Given that the Super League proposals further distort the balance of power in favour of the top sides, by channelling TV and sponsorship money to the elite, what chance has a club from outside the chosen few of affording the necessary seating requirements? And even if they do overcome the odds stacked against them, there's no guarantee that they'd actually be promoted. Seeing how the FA has caved in to the big clubs over the number of teams in the Super League (18 becomes 20, with 22 guaranteed starters) what's stopping those clubs deciding they don't want promotion and relegation at all, or perhaps they'd rather have re-election, so that when Wimbledon finish bottom they can sling them out, but when it's Everton, well....

But it's not just the excluded clubs who will lose out. Traditionally, the transfer of players from lower to higher division clubs has proved mutually beneficial. English First Division sides have long been appalling at spotting young talent, and relied on small clubs as breeding grounds. Where are Liverpool going to get Ian Rush from if Chester go to the wall? How are Aston Villa going to get £5.5 million for David Platt if there's no Crewe Alexandra to buy him off in the first place? Would Dean Saunders be where he is now without Swansea, Brighton and Oxford?

Graham Kelly tried to market the idea as a way of improving the England team. Graham Taylor's thrown that one back in his face, and now it's time for everyone else to stand up and be counted. There's too much at stake to stoically sit back and say "Well, it's going to happen anyway, what can I do?"

The Government should follow through with Sports Minister Robert Atkins threat, and withdraw the pools betting levy refund from the Super League clubs. Clubs should withdraw en bloc from the FA Cup. If it takes a players' strike, then so be it.

But all these things will only happen if fans' pressure is irresistable. So write to your M.P., write to Samesh Kumar, write to Martin Thomas, Blues' PFA rep. Tell them what you think of the Super-League, and what they must do to oppose it. Above all, get involved in the Campaign to say NO to the Super League. One lesson of the anti-ID card campaign was to keep the issue in the public eye. The Football Supporters Association has launched a nationwide petition against the plans. Sign it, and get others to sign it. The FA are proposing a League for people whose idea of watching Manchester United is reaching out with their fingers on a Sunday afternoon and going click. If the Super League goes through, then it'll still be football but not as we know it.

Steve Moss, Chairman, West Midlands F.S.A.

The West Midlands branch of the FSA meets every second Monday of the month at the Pen and Wig, Dale End, Birmingham. Brendan Batson, Deputy Chief Executive of the PFA. is the guest speaker on September 9th. For further details about the FSA, and the anti-Super-League campaign, contact Steve Moss (021-459-1482) or Richard Clark (0384 392975).